

News Items and Public Crime Summary for Week Ending January 23, 2010

Aruba – US-Owned Valero Refinery Take-Over Talks Continue

The Venezuelan state-owned oil company PdVSA continues to show interest in the Aruban US-owned Valero refinery. Venezuelan Deputy Foreign Minister Francisco Arias Cardenas and PdVSA executive Asdrubal Chavez visited Aruba for a meeting concerning the future of refinery, last week. Valero representatives from San Antonio, Texas were also present at the meeting. Aruban PM Mike Eman and Minister of Finance, Utilities, Communication and Energy Mike de Meza have scheduled a press conference today. PetroChina representatives, the most important candidate for a take-over of the Aruba refinery until recent, were not present at the meeting. (Various media)

Kingdom – Haiti Earthquake Support in Full Swing

The Dutch government continues to coordinate all Kingdom aid for earthquake struck Haiti. All the Dutch support teams are part of the international effort coordinated by the UN. Netherlands Antilles PM Emily De Jongh-Elhage and Aruba PM Mike Eman fully support the Kingdom endeavors. A Dutch naval ship left Aruba for Haiti to provide assistance to earthquake victims. Various local businesses and organizations have donated relief goods, in cooperation with the Red Cross. (Various media)

Curacao – 10th Pre-Election Poll: Last Prognosis Before Elections

The latest and last poll results released by Opinion Korsou on January 18, would give the coalition group List for Change (LdK) seven seats; governing PAR four; and 2 opposition (non-coalition) Sovereign Party three seats in the 22-seat legislature. 41% of the electoral is still undecided, according to the researchers. Based on a margin of error, coalition partners PNP and FOL could still receive enough votes for one of the 14 Curacao seats in Netherlands Antilles parliament. The election date is January 22. The polling organizers stated that their poll is independent and scientifically based. The poll is also available on www.opinionkorsou.com. (Antilliaans Dagblad, Extra)

Kingdom - Haiti Update

The Dutch MFA, as Kingdom spokes-authority, announced that the whereabouts of eleven Dutch nationals, including four Antilleans, in Haiti were still unaccounted for. Nine of the eleven were staying at a hotel that collapsed, including the four Antilleans. The Kingdom government continues to coordinate its efforts closely with Haiti, the UN and the international community. (Various media)

Aruba – Brazilian Petrobras Still Interested in Valero Refinery

Brazilian state oil company Petrobras is still interested in the take-over of the US-owned Valero refinery in Aruba. "The interest is mutual," Aruba PM Mike Eman said. Petrobras

expressed interest in a refinery purchase in 2008 and 2009, but both times the acquisition was derailed. (Various media)

Curacao – Unemployment Continues to Drop

The unemployment percentage in Curacao has dropped from 10.3% in October 2008 to 9.7% in October 2009, according to a Central Bureau of Statistics Press release. The youth unemployment (15-24 years) dropped from 26.3% to 24.7% over the same period. Compared to October of 2008, the working population has not changed significantly and remains at approximately 56,600. (Various media)

Antilles - Floating Voter Will Determine Elections Result

Approximately 41% of the Curacao electorate has no allegiance to any political party and their unpredictable decisions will probably swing the outcome of the Friday parliamentary elections, according to surveyors Stradius and the University of the Dutch Caribbean (UDC). Both researchers predict a neck-and-neck between the coalition PAR party and opposition party LdK; Stradius foresees an LdK victory and UDC a PAR triumph. Curacao has 114,215 registered voters, St. Maarten 19,355, and Saba 780. (Various media)

Curacao – SmartMatic Voting Machines To Be Used Again

Curacao will again use the voting machines purchased in 2007 from Venezuelan-American Company Smartmatic (www.smartmatic.com). The SmartMatic was used in the 2007 regular election and the 2009 referendum, and it was chosen because it has a 'paper trail', that is, it prints a receipt that acts as a ballot. Representatives of SmartMatic have programmed the voting machines, under supervision of Civil Registry personnel. (Various media)

St. Maarten – Two Indian Men Possible Victims in TIP Case

Two Indian men, living on St. Maarten since 2005 and employed by a jeweler, are reportedly victims in a trafficking in persons case. The men were imprisoned at home, deprived of their freedom and had their food rationed by a man they called "The Boss", according to unconfirmed statements. They were interviewed by the police, but reportedly refuse to file charges. "We just want to leave," the men said in a media statement. The case is under investigation by law enforcement. (Daily Herald)

Unedited Editorial in St. Maarten Daily Herald; Windward Islands Vote Crucial

The question in Curaçao going into Friday's elections is not so much what party will win, but which "camp." The current PAR/PNP/FOL government hopes to gather support of enough of the island's 14 seats in the 22-seat Antillean Parliament to be able to stay in the saddle with the help of parties of the other islands that have supported the process of constitutional change and accompanying debt relief, "to let us finish the job" as the PAR campaign slogan says. The three parties MAN, NPA and FK that have united on the "Lista di Kambio" (List for Change) for this election are hoping to win a majority,

possibly with the help of other local opposition parties such as DP and PS, as well as parties from other islands. However, parties of the other islands that have supported the forging of new relations within the Dutch Kingdom scheduled to take effect on 10-10-10 are much more likely to stick with their current coalition partners, if given the choice. That goes for the UPB in Bonaire, the WIPM in Saba and DP-Statia, but also both the NA and DP in St. Maarten, as they have been on board the "constitutional train" from the beginning.

What all this means is that the election in Curaçao has in a sense been turned into yet another, unofficial, constitutional referendum, following no less than three such official population consultations on the island since 1994. With the most recent referendum on the result of negotiations with the Netherlands and other islands ending in approval by a narrow margin of 52 to 48 per cent, Friday's election is to a certain extent a new battle between "Yes" and "No."

Various polls held on the island have produced widely varying outcomes, but the result between the two "camps" is in any case expected to be fairly close again, so that the parties on the other islands that win seats may very well play a decisive role. That makes it all the more important for people in the Windward Islands to make good use of their right to vote.

Aruba – Valero to Stay Trough June 1

San Antonio based Valero Energy Corp said on Thursday a framework to resolve a long-standing dispute over taxes on its Aruba refinery had been worked out with the Aruban government, but must be approved by the Aruba parliament.

Under the proposed resolution framework, Valero would pay the equivalent of US \$113 million to the Aruban government, Valero spokesperson Day said, adding the company also would keep all workers on payroll through June 1 at the refinery, which was idled last year. In future years, Valero would make a minimum payment of US \$10 million per year. Valero idled the Aruba refinery in July and called the shutdown indefinite in August, but kept employees on the payroll. The refinery cannot make finished motor fuels, only intermediate feedstocks, most of them shipped to the East Coast.

Valero was hit hard by the demand downturn first as oil prices rocketed in 2008 and then when the recession took hold in 2009.

A government spokesperson was not immediately available to comment on the taxes deal.

The company inherited a tax holiday from certain taxes that was supposed to last through 2010. The tab for the BBO tax, set at 1% of the refinery's export sales and 3% of its Aruban sales, has been estimated by analysts to be over US \$200 million.

In the third quarter of last year, Valero set aside a loss contingency of US \$140 million for an eventual settlement of the tax. The previous Aruban government of Nelson Oduber adopted the BBO tax in 2007, at a time when refiners were reaping record profits. This ignited a dispute that led to an arbitration battle in the Netherlands.

The largest refining company in the U.S., Valero bought the Aruba plant in 2004 but has been looking to sell it. No date has been set for a sale, and the company has declined to provide further details. Day said the company "will continue to work with the new Aruban government to seek alternatives for the refinery."

Aruba PM Mike Eman reportedly told reporters that "some very impressive companies are showing interest" in the plant "but the solution is not there yet." The refinery accounted for 30 to 35% of the Aruban gross domestic product in previous years.

Executives with potential buyer PetroChina have told Reuters the dispute over the BBO tax must be resolved before the Asian energy giant would consider purchasing the refinery. Valero has never identified would-be buyers, but spokesman Bill Day said discussions about a possible sale were continuing. PetroChina recently took over a lease for 5 million barrels of crude oil storage at the Statia Terminals on St. Eustatius. (Various media)

Curacao – “De Rode Leeuw” Trafficking in Persons Case to Court

The trafficking in persons case against two men and a woman, who were arrested at local nightclub “De Rode Leeuw,” is going to court on February 5. The three are suspected of sex trafficking by force, fraud and coercion of two Dominican women. The victims were found by law enforcement officials harmed, deprived of their food, water, and freedom. Also, their passports and clothes were confiscated by the suspects. (Amigoe)

Antilles – PM De Jongh-Elhage Tendered Cabinet Resignation

Netherlands Antilles PM Emily de Jongh-Elhage tendered her cabinet resignation to Netherlands Antilles Governor Goedgedrag, a day prior to the parliamentary elections which is a normal constitutional procedure. (Various media)

CURAÇAO

Crime January 15 – 21

On January 18 there was a shooting incident in Saliña in which two men were injured. The following evening, two occupants of a parked vehicle in Santa Maria were shot and injured in a drive-by shooting. There was no clear motive for the shootings.

Traffic accidents up in 2009

The Curaçao Traffic Safety Association announced that 10,978 traffic accidents were registered in 2009, a six per cent increase over 2008. There were 25 fatalities. Most of the fatal accidents occurred during weekends (13) and the majority of the victims were between 20 and 30 years old. The Weg naar Westpunt saw the most number of traffic victims in 2009, the same as in previous years. December had the highest number of accidents (1,050), with December 31 showing a peak of 56 accidents (Amigoe).

Year Accidents Injuries Fatalities

2006 8,481 1,037 25

2007 9,225 985 19

2008 10,370 958 18

2009 10,978 662 25

"The Weekly Press Summary is a compilation of stories running in the Netherlands Antilles and Aruban press that is intended to alert readers about items of interest to them. There is no interpretation or verification of the facts contained therein."